

Nostalgia in Photographed Books for Children - the Case of Photography Books of Children in the Kibbutz

Authors : Ayala Amir

Abstract : The paper presents interdisciplinary research which draws on the literary study and the cultural study of photography to explore a literary genre defined by nostalgia – the photographed book for children. This genre, which was popular in the second half of the 20th century, presents the romantic, nostalgic image of childhood created in the visual arts in the 18th century (as suggested by Ann Higonnet). At the same time, it capitalizes on the nostalgia inherent in the event of photography as formulated by Jennifer Green-Lewis: photography frames a moment in the present while transforming it into a past longed for in the future. Unlike Freudian melancholy, nostalgia is an effect that enables representation by acknowledging the loss and containing it in the very experience of the object. The representation and preservation of the lost object (nature, childhood, innocence) are in the center of the genre of children's photography books – a modern version of ancient pastoral. In it, the unique synergia of word and image results in a nostalgic image of childhood in an era already conquered by modernization. The nostalgic effect works both in the representation of space – an Edenic image of nature already shadowed by its demise, and of time – an image of childhood imbued by what Gill Bartholnyes calls the "looking backward aesthetics" – under the sign of loss. Little critical attention has been devoted to this genre with the exception of the work of Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, who noted the nostalgic effect of the well-known series of photography books by Astrid Lindgren and Anna Riwkin-Brick. This research aims to elaborate Kümmerling-Meibauer's approach using the theories of the study of photography, word-image studies, as well as current studies of childhood. The theoretical perspectives are implemented in the case study of photography books created in one of the most innovative social structures in our time – the Israeli Kibbutz. This communal way of life designed a society where children will experience their childhood in a parentless rural environment that will save them from the fate of the Oedipal fall. It is suggested that in documenting these children in a fictional format, photographers and writers, images and words cooperated in creating nostalgic works situated on the border between nature and culture, imagination and reality, utopia and its realization in history.

Keywords : nostalgia, photography, childhood, children's books, kibutz

Conference Title : ICNMM 2021 : International Conference on Nostalgia, Melancholy and Memory

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : September 09-10, 2021